

# In the Balance: Report of a Research Study Exploring Information for Weight Management

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**Citation Information. Libri. Volume 60, Issue 2, Pages 142–152, ISSN (Online) 1865-8423, ISSN (Print) 0024-2667, DOI: 10.1515/libr.2010.013, /June/2010**

## Abstract

This paper uses findings from a research study called Net.Weight to examine the concepts of interaction, information quality and Internet-based information from the perspective of people engaged in managing their weight. The Net.Weight study was a two-year project funded by the British government's Department of Health and located in the city of Brighton and Hove. It examined the potential for increased, innovative and effective uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support the self management of weight. The study had several inter-related research strands and the findings discussed in the paper emerged primarily from participatory learning workshops and evaluative interviews. The paper demonstrates that the interaction between people is an important aspect of the information process, which is often neglected in the literature. It suggests that exploring the user-user dimension might add to the understanding of information effectiveness. It also suggests that an approach to information and health literacy which includes a social as well as an individual perspective is necessary. On quality assessment, it supports findings from other studies that organisational authority is a key measure of reliability for lay users and that quality assessment tools have a limited role in the assessment process. The Net.Weight participants embraced the Internet as a medium for weight management information only when it added value to their existing information and weight management practices and when it could be integrated into their everyday lives.